

Carpenter Ant

Florida carpenter ants are among the largest ants found in Florida as well as one of the most common indoor pests. During flight season carpenter ants can be found in alarming numbers as they forage or fly indoors and out, especially at night. Complaints are numerous during the spring swarm season, usually between April and June, when winged specimens are often found along window ledges or near sliding glass doors. It is common to mistake these winged ants for winged termites.

Homeowners are often concerned about carpenter ants causing damage to the structural integrity of their homes, but Florida carpenter ants are not of the wood-damaging variety. They seek existing voids to nest, and excavate only soft material such as rotten or pithy wood and Styrofoam. They will hollow out wood softened by moisture and/or fungi to create nests. The wood may be in tree stumps or dead tree limbs, or in a structure that contains rotting or damaged wood. Bits of debris, called frass, are often ejected from nesting sites. Frass consists of bits of excavated materials and pieces of dead insects, including carpenter ants. Carpenter ants prefer nesting sites that are close to moisture and food sources, are safe from predators such as birds and lizards, and are safe from flooding and heat.

Florida carpenter ants tend to forage at night, with peak activity two hours before sunset until two hours after sunset, then again around dawn. Foraging proceeds in very loosely defined trails or by individual ants that seem to wander aimlessly. These ants have a fondness for sweets and can be found in areas where sweets are readily accessible. Similarly, they are fond of sweet floral nectars and honeydews produced by sucking insects such as aphids, scales and mealybugs. Trees and shrubs which are infested with these honeydew-producing insects or produce nectars will have ants wandering in all directions over the trunk, stems and leaves. Carpenter ants will also seek out other insects, both living and dead, for food.

Direct treatment of the nesting site is recommended because these sites harbor the brood, the queen and the workers. Finding the nest site can be extremely difficult. Homeowners, as well as pest control operators, are often met with failure when trying to locate hidden nesting sites.